

Why Journey to RAW 2025 in Eau Claire?

Thinking of coming to Eau Claire for RAW 2025? Convince yourself through the eyes of Nobel Prize novelist John Steinbeck. His first time visiting Wisconsin was in 1960 traveling cross country to rediscover America and write *Travels with Charley, In Search of America*. Steinbeck reflected on the State “...I was unprepared for the beauty of this region”... *“I never saw a country that changed so rapidly and because I had not expected it everything I saw brought delight.”*

Beginning in Maine, Steinbeck pointed to California returning on southern routes accompanied by Charley, his French poodle. Entering Wisconsin he stopped in the Dells saying he *“was not prepared for the weird country sculptured by the Ice Age, a strange gleaming country.”* Going north on Highway 12 to Highway 10 at Osseo, (we know he entered Minnesota on 10), he drove west through Strum and Eleva, three villages you’ll ride through July 12. *“...I had been told Wisconsin is a lovely state, but the telling had not prepared me. It was a magic day. The land dripped with richness.”* Onto the Twin Cities he went. His purpose to learn more of America, the land and people. “I had not felt the country for twenty-five years. In short, I was writing of something I did not know about”.

You’ll leave Eau Claire on the Chippewa River State Trail and will *definitely* feel this country as you ride alongside the Chippewa, *the* power house river of 19th century timber commerce. As the drainage basin for the Manitowish, Bear, Flambeau, Brunet, Thornapple, Jump and Yellow rivers the Chippewa meets the Eau Claire river at Phoenix Park, your start point downtown in walking distance to restaurants, hotels and bars.

The RAW course development team has for you a splendid route through the most picturesque ridges and valleys of southern Eau Claire County and northern Trempealeau County which *Bicycling* magazine once called “cycling nirvana.” In these early miles you’ll ride the extraordinarily beautiful ridges near Eleva known locally as “the Eleva Skyline.” The hills overlap each other in stunning dimension and Wisconsin uniqueness, Steinbeck saying the setting *“...changed so rapidly,” “There was a penetration of the light into solid substance so that I seemed to see into things, deep in, and I’ve seen that kind of light elsewhere only in Greece.” “The land dripped with richness.”*

The “Skyline” may be nearly like riding in augmented reality but pinch yourself, this is real. The team brings you through these panoramas with thoughtful consideration by routing on high quality low traveled county roads with tolerable gradients. Moreover, you’ll be immersed in the colors and changing scenes during prime time; the first two hours of sunrise.

But why drive 200 or 300 miles for a one day ride from Milwaukee, Kenosha, the northeast or Sinsinawa? The beauty of the Chippewa Valley helps make the answer simple. Here might be unexplored cycling for you or revisit for the superb route. Or best yet, find your “why” in Steinbeck’s own.

“A trip , a safari, an exploration, is an entity, different from all other journeys. It has a personality, temperament, individuality, uniqueness. A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike. And all plans, safeguards, policing and coercion are fruitless. We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip, a trip takes us.”

Marty Zens first rode Eau Claire and Trempealeau Counties in 1973 while an English Major and Scandinavian Studies student at UW-Eau Claire. In August 1978 and '79 he was one of seventeen riders who circumnavigated the State over sixteen consecutive days in the 1,600 mile Wisconsin Millennium Tour. The group voted the Eau Claire-Eleva-Strum-Whitehall Trempealeau County ride as one the top two for best scenery of the 32. He lives in Eau Claire near the Chippewa and rides the roads of RAW '25.